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SILVIUS'S LETTER

Theo. Burn 18
To the Reverend

Dr. SHERLOCK.

When an Author is examining Prejudices which the Reader is not prepossessed with, whatever He shall say will seem reasonable enough: But the same Author ever stretches things too far, when He engages Prejudices where- with the Reader is too deeply tinged.— *Malebranche.*

In many Cases, one with Amazement hears the Argu- ings, and is astonish'd at the Obstinacy of a Worthy Man, who yields not to the Evidence of Reason, tho' laid be- fore Him as clear as Day-light.— *Mr. Locke.*

Licet ego discrepantes de Religione sententias sine ullâ erga Autores Indignatione investigare soleo, non possum tamen dis- simulare, aculeatos — Sarcasmos in materiâ sacrâ mihi quam maximè displicere. — Limborch.

Iustitia partes sunt non violare Homines, verecundia non offendere. — Cicero.

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LETTER

To the Reverend

Dr. SHERLOCK.

When an Author is examining Prejudices which the
Reader is not prejudiced with, whatever the shall say
will seem reasonable enough: But the same Author ever
the same things too far, when he engages Prejudices which
when the Reader is too deeply engaged. — *Alas, alas!*

In many Cases one with a Amendment bears the Sign-
ing, and is admitted at the Office of the Worthy Man,
who holds not to the Evidence. — *Alas, alas!*



I am a good supporter of Religion, and I am sure the well-
known Librarian, in his own right, will not be
induced, nor will he be induced in matters of this kind
to be induced. — *Alas, alas!*

Religion is a great thing, and I am sure the well-
known Librarian, in his own right, will not be
induced, nor will he be induced in matters of this kind
to be induced. — *Alas, alas!*

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SILVUS's
LETTER
TO THE
Reverend Dr. SHERLOCK.

S I R,

YOU have been, of late, so persecuted with Letters, and had such a variety of Correspondents, that a Man may seem very troublesome and importunate, who adds to the number of either. I assure you, it is not my intention to give you Disturbance, nor do I wish you any from other Hands. Tho I conceal myself under

der a feigned Name, I shall not take an opportunity from thence to asperse your Character, or insult you with petulant Language. Besides the Regard which is due to your Function, and your Superior Station in the Church, I am not insensible of your Personal Accomplishments. The Extent of your Learning, and the Fineness of your Natural Parts, are acknowledged, and admired, even by the bitterest of your Adversaries. But then they think you are over-run with Prejudices, and accuse you of cherishing and giving way to them. Give me leave to agree with them so far, as to suspect that your Mind is not quite clear of those unhappy Weeds: but that you are conscious of them, is what I will not allow myself either to say, or think. That a Man may be prejudiced, and not know it, is an Observation as true, as it is common. But excepting very extraordinary Cases, I presume it is in his power to know it. And without doubt he ought to endeavour it vigorously, lest he be wanting to the Truth, or to Himself. I wish Sir, you would look into your Heart, and search every Corner of it. Perhaps you have done it already; but let me entreat you to do it again. Possibly you may find, at last, some little Partialities, which have hitherto escaped you, and which without such a narrow search, may remain undiscovered.

I have often wondered, that none of the Learned have laid down a Set of Rules, to direct

direct Men in these Enquiries ; And cannot but think this may justly be reckoned among the *Desiderata*. I shall not be so vain, as to think of supplying this Defect : but one little Expedient I beg leave to recommend, at least to offer it to your Consideration. I mean, that you would have recourse to your *Imagination*, which if it be as strong, as it is lively, may enable you to succeed in the following Experiment.

I would desire you then to *Imagine*, if you can, that there never was such a Man in the World, as the present *Bishop of Bangor*. In the next place, that the Doctrines now in debate, or (to lessen your trouble) that particular Doctrine about *Sincerity*, was expressly contained in the Articles of our Church, and had been so from the beginning. Be pleased to *Imagine* further, that you was only entering into Orders, and was called upon to subscribe. — When you have gone thus far, I should be glad to know, how that Doctrine would appear to you in this Light ; whether it would Bar your Subscription, or whether after a careful Examination, you would not be able to reconcile it, in some measure, with Reason and Scripture. And lastly, Whether it would require more softening than our *Seventeenth* Article, or the Second Clause of the *Twentieth*. I am apt to think that placed in such a view, it would not appear so Heretical as it has done, nor in those odious
and

and terrible Colours; wherein you have lately beheld it. Instead of calling it in derision, a Pagan Goddess; you might possibly think it deserved the Name of a Christian Grace, if not the very Bond of all Graces and Vertues.

Be this as it will, I cannot but think, that of all those Points which have been controverted of late, This of *Sincerity* is the most important, both in itself, and in its Consequences. Very many weighty Questions depend upon it, and therefore I would gladly have it thoroughly considered, and brought, if possible, to a full and final Decision. If it should be now laid asleep, Posterity will revive it; and if we can, we may as well save them the Trouble.

The *Bishop's* Notion seems to me, I must own, so well supported, and backed with such strength of Evidence, that I cannot forbear wondering, it has not yet entered into so clear a Head as yours. Your *Preface* to Mr. *Stebbing's* Remarks I have read several times, and carefully considered; in order to find out, what it is that chiefly sticks with you. Accordingly I have picked out, to the best of my Judgment, the principal Difficulties; with which the rest have such a close connexion, that if *those* can be removed, *these*, I think, will vanish in course. Permit me then to endeavour your Satisfaction in a few words. For I am resolved not to be tedious. You will upon this account forgive me the sooner; especially if I say nothing that

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is rude or offensive, which I hope I shall not—
If I cannot *reason*, I will not *rail*.

In the First Place you want to be shewn, *that Sincerity is the only Term, or Condition, of Salvation proposed in the Gospel*. Will nothing less content you? For my part, I will not undertake to shew you this; but I hope to shew you something that you will find altogether as much to the Purpose. What the Apostle means by a *Willing Mind*, that I presume the Bishop means by *Sincerity*. Now I appeal to yourself, whether a *Willing Mind* be not substituted by the Apostle, in the room of those Duties, which happen at any time to be impracticable to a Christian? Whether he does not in effect declare it equivalent thereto in the Sight of God? Was not the small Donation of the poor Widow in the Gospel, as pleasing in God's Sight, as the most splendid Benefactions of the Wealthy? You will not deny it. It is true she had something to give: But supposing she had had nothing at all; would not her *Willing Mind*, her good Disposition have recommended her as effectually to the Divine Favour? You must grant me this too.

The next Question then is, Whether a *Willing Mind* will stand a Christian in the same stead, with respect to other Duties accidentally impracticable? Tho' the Apostle be speaking only of Charity, yet the Rule which he takes
occasion

occasion from thence to lay down, is general, without any Exception or Limitation annexed. Does it appear then from any other Places of Scripture, that such a Limitation is implied, and ought to be understood? If any Man know of any such Passages, let him produce them; I am sure I cannot recollect one. Does *Reason* then require us to limit the Apostles Rule to that Duty which occasion'd the mention of it? Quite the contrary; as every thinking Man must acknowledge—— Publick Worship is manifestly a great and important Duty; but if a Man lies under an incapacity of getting to Church, will not a good Mind, and a hearty Desire to discharge that Duty, be accepted instead of it? —— If a Man, who has found a Purse of Money, sincerely desires, and takes abundance of Pains to discover the Right Owner; tho' he never meet with him, has he not acted justly, and done his Duty? — Another Christian is melancholy, and thereby subject to the incursions of Evil Thoughts. He strives and struggles with them very hard, even to the utmost of his Power; but cannot wholly subdue this Mischief. Will it not be allowed that he is thus far innocent? But I need not multiply Cases. I may lay it down as a general Truth, to which I know no Exception, That where there is an invincible inability to perform any Duty, there a *Willing Mind*, or a sincere

sincere Disposition will be as graciously receiv'd as the Duty itself would have been.

In the next Place I would ask you Sir, Whether you can think of any Reason, why this Rule should hold only in practical Duties, and not as well in matters of Faith? If I do my utmost to discover the Truth, and believe rightly the Doctrines of the Gospel; Will those Errors which I may happen to fall into, be imputed to me? Will not my Faith (such as it is) be accepted for the sake of my *Willing Mind*? If you say not, then it will be incumbent on you to shew a plain Reason, why a *Willing Mind* ought not to be supposed as efficacious and acceptable in Points of *Faith*, as in Matters of *Practise*. If I would fain relieve the Poor, but have nothing to give; you will own my Charity is accepted. If I would fain believe rightly, but cannot; Will you say that my Faith is not accepted? Pray tell me why. Are not these Cases parallel, and do they not both stand on the same foot? — I can but think of one Objection to this, and it is a very inconsiderable one. It may be said that in the former Case, a Man is only destitute of outward Means; but that there is nothing in his Mind to depretiate or allay the Goodness of his Disposition. Whereas in the Case of an Erroneous Faith, a Man is not only destitute of the Truth, but actually infected with Error; and then it may be further alledged; That all

Error is necessarily odious to the God of Truth. How far, and in what sense God hates Error, I need not enquire. It may safely be affirmed that he cannot, in any degree, hate any of his Creatures, upon the account of such Errors as are unavoidable. I am as sure of this, as I am of the Truth of any of my Faculties. Can a Being infinitely Righteous and Good take Offence, where none is given? Or can a Man give Offence, in that very Case, where he used all possible Endeavours to please? A good Man would not be offended at his Child or his Servant in such a Case; Dare we then impute such Rigour to the Supreme Being? — I conclude therefore, that both the *Practise* and *Faith* of Christians will be accepted according to the Sincerity of their Endeavours. This Natural Reason teaches us, and we see the Apostle expressly confirms it.

But here Sir I suppose you will Object, that though Sincerity will entitle a Christian to the Mercies of God, yet it will not entitle him to God's *Covenanted* Mercies. This is to me very surprizing. Does then the Apostle mean, that by vertue of a *Willing Mind*, a Christian will be accepted, not as a good Christian, but as a good Heathen? This you will not say. Does he then mean that a *Willing Mind* will cover the unavoidable Failures of a Christian's *Practise*, but not of his *Faith*. This is equally incredible and absurd, as I have shewn already. You will

will say, The Gospel enjoins us to believe rightly the Articles of the Christian Faith, and that this is one of its general Conditions. I add that it enjoins us to practise rightly and fully its Precepts, and that this is another of its general Conditions, if I may be allowed that Expression. I further observe that it particularly requires us to *give, to every one that asketh*. A certain poor Christian, tho' very well disposed, gives not a farthing to any Man, because he has it not. Has he broken the Conditions of the Gospel, and lost his Title to its Benefits and Rewards? You will say No. I ask you the Reason, and suppose you will answer me, that the plain meaning of the foregoing Precept can be no other than this; *viz.* that every Christian must give freely, who is able so to do. I presume you would make me this Answer, for indeed I can think of no other. I go on therefore to suppose another Christian unavoidably failing in some Points of Faith. Has *he* broken the Conditions of the Gospel, and forfeited its Rewards? I answer, No. But the Gospel requires him to believe rightly. What then? The plain meaning of such Texts can be no other than this; *viz.* That every Christian must believe rightly who is able so to do. Most undoubtedly, Sir, this Answer is either good in both Cases, or in neither; and therefore take your Choice. If you can make it appear that it is just and reasonable in one Case, but not

in the other, you have me for your Profelite.

But to return ; I believe, Sir, I might have taken a shorter Method for the dispatching of your Difficulty. For tho' I will not maintain, as I told you before, that Sincerity is the only *Term* of Salvation proposed in the Gospel ; yet I think it may be affirmed in that Sence, wherein you seem to deny it. I presume according to you, the general Condition of the Gospel Covenant is an adequate and exact Observation of the whole Evangelical Law. At least I suppose you make this the Primary Condition. But pray let us carefully consider this matter. That the First Covenant insisted on such a perfect and unfailling Performance, is not to be questioned : but as this is absolutely impossible with Man in his Fallen State, I cannot see how it should have any Place at all in the Christian Covenant. Let me not be misunderstood. I grant that the Evangelical Law is the true *Rule* of a Christian's Practice, yet I suppose with Mr. Norris, that it is not the *Condition* of Life. We must endeavour to obey every Precept of the Gospel : but an entire and unfinning Obedience, tho' it was the *Term* of the Covenant of *Works*, is not I think any *Term* of the Covenant of Grace. Make it appear that this is an Error, and it shall immediately be given up.

What then is the chief Condition of the Second Covenant ? The Author whom I last mentioned, says the Gospel exchanges *Repentance*,
for

for unfinning Obedience, as the Condition of Salvation. But it seems to me that Repentance is not the Primary, but the Secondary Condition of the Gospel Covenant. It is plain that *Sincerity* falls short of a Legal and Literal Obedience, and 'tis as plain, that it excels Repentance. And being thus below the one, and above the other, it must have its place between them : the Consequence of which is, that if *Sincerity* be any Condition of the Gospel, it must precede Repentance. But this is further evident from hence, *viz.* That Repentance can only be intended to make up the Failures of *Sincerity*, and reaches no further. A Man may, and ought to repent the not having done his Best, in any Instance of Duty ; but he cannot have any cause to repent his not having done, what in his Circumstances was impossible for him to do. From whence I think it plainly follows, that *Sincerity* is not only prior to Repentance, but the very first and principal Condition of the Gospel Covenant.

Thus, Sir, I might have answered you at first : but I had a mind to argue upon that which I took to be your own Principle. Tho' I verily believe this Notion to be just, which I have now said before you ; yet I have no need to insist on it. State this matter as you please, *Sincerity* must come in, either as the grand Condition of the Gospel Covenant, or as an equivalent thereto : either of which is sufficient for my Purpose.

I shall

I shall now go on to answer your Objection about the Impossibility of Converting a Papist, on his Lordship's Principle. If Sincerity will procure Men as much Favour, as Truth and Orthodoxy ; from thence you seem to think it will follow, that they who are in the Wrong must be altogether out of the reach of Conviction ; and that if it were possible to convince them, it would be absurd and unreasonable to attempt it. In answer to this, permit me to lay before you the following Dialogue between a Papist and a Protestant.

Pap. Why should I give myself the Trouble to consider your Arguments? I am conscious of my own Sincerity, and this you say will excuse me in the Sight of God. If I should prove to be in the Wrong, yet since my Errors will not obstruct my Salvation, why should I be solicitous about the removal of them?

Pro. Your Religion is in many respects so repugnant to Revelation and right Reason, that you ought to examine your Heart to the very bottom, before you pronounce yourself sincere. But be this as it will, however sincere you may have been till now ; you must quit your Pretensions to Sincerity for the future, if you slight my Arguments, and reject my Endeavours to inform and convince you.

Pap. Why so?

Pro.

Pro. Because this is utterly inconsistent with Sincerity, at least according to my Notion of it. He only is sincere in my Esteem, whose Ear is always open to Information ; and who continues ever ready and willing to receive new Light, and fresh Evidence. It is not enough that a Man has been once thus well disposed. Consider therefore what it is you mean, when you talk of being conscious of your own Sincerity. Have you heretofore done your utmost to inform yourself aright ? It may be so ; but let me only desire you (and the Request is very reasonable) to continue in the same Disposition, and then you will find yourself under an Obligation to hear and weigh my Arguments. If you refuse this, you are not sincere now, whatever you may have been formerly.

Pap. Allowing what you say, my Question still returns with a very small alteration. For tho' I be obliged to hear and examine your Arguments, yet why should you give yourself the Trouble to offer them ? You own I am safe as I am, if I be sincere ; and you will own me sincere if I reject no Opportunities of Information. Why then do you tempt me ? Why do you put me to a needless Test, without any prospect of Advantage either to yourself, or me ?

Pro. The Answer is plain. It is as much my Duty to speak in this Case, as it's yours to hear.
Every

Every Man is obliged to propagate the Truth, according to his Abilities and Opportunities ; especially such Truths as I am contending for.

Pap. Still I am at a loss. I cannot comprehend how it can be yours or any Man's Duty, to trouble himself and perplex his Neighbour, when he can propose no Benefit to either. Could you better my Condition by convincing me, I should not wonder at your being obliged to attempt it : But how can it be any Man's Duty to labour in vain ?

Pro. You know as well as I, that it is my Duty to instruct my Neighbour, and to endeavour to convince him of his Errors. And though I could no way account for it, your former Question would nevertheless be answered.

Pap. But not to my Satisfaction. For since it is absurd to suppose it should be any Man's Duty, to trouble himself and his Neighbour to no purpose, this shews at least the Weakness and Falsity of your own Principle.

Pro. You interrupted me ; I was going to shew you, that this is not a needless and unprofitable piece of Work, as you imagine it ; but that it may be done to very good purpose, and actually is so, wherever it succeeds. For pray tell me, Is not Truth a Real Good ?

Pap. Away with such Metaphysical Goodness.

Pro. Have a care what you say. Truth will be one of the principal Enjoyments of the
Blessed

Blessed hereafter ; and I hope you will not call any part of their Happiness Metaphysical. Even in this Life, is not Truth a Real Enjoyment, and one of the Best and Purest we meet with ? Does it not bring Pleasure and Content to the Mind of Man ? Surely then it must be a real Good : and by consequence it may be worth a Man's while to communicate it to his Neighbour. Had you lived among the Antients, and dropped such an Expression in the hearing of *Plato*, or *Cicero* ; you would have pass'd for a sort of an Atheist. But to return, this is not all that I have to say to you about this matter.

Pap. Pray what further ?

Pro. Why the convincing you of your Errors, will redound to your Spiritual Advantage, in such a sense, as cannot be rejected even by yourself.

Pap. Now you say something. Pray make it out.

Pro. Do you not worship Saints ?

Pap. Yes.

Pro. This practical Error is prejudicial to your Soul. That intercourse which you hold with the Creature, were it held with the Creator, would undeniably turn to better account : I speak not of the Success of your Prayers, but of the Natural Influence and Operation which they have on the Soul. The Soul is evidently improved many ways by its Addresses to the
C Creator.

Creator. But most of these Improvements are not to be had from Creature-Worship. This Error therefore of yours, by lessening your Spiritual Improvements, does in some measure unqualify you for the Happiness of Hereafter ; and thereby naturally deprives you of part of that Reward, which you might otherwise obtain.

Pap. I thought your Opinion had been, that my Sincerity would entitle me to the same degree of Happiness, with those who are free from my supposed Errors.

Pro. That was your Mistake. It can only entitle you to that measure of Happiness for which you are qualified. Where Mens Improvements are equal, they will (if equally sincere) be equally rewarded, but not otherwise. If therefore Mens Errors hinder their Improvements, they will proportionably diminish their Happiness. And since your Errors are of this Nature, as I have already shewn you in one Instance, and might do in many more ; I hope you will now be able to understand, for what Reason I am obliged to endeavour your Conviction.

Pap. Your Speculations are so fine spun, they will never hold.

Pro. Nay, if you come from arguing to prognosticating, I have done.

By

By way of Supplement to this Dialogue, give me leave to add something concerning the Effects of Sincerity. It has already been often granted by the Defenders of the Bishop's Doctrine, that of two Christians equally sincere, the one may be happier than the other in the next World. I dare say his Lordship never meant to deny this ; I am sure I can find nothing in his Writings that amounts to a denial of it. As to that *Position* which Mr. Stebbing has opposed, you know how the Bishop's Advocates explain it. They alledge that equal Improvements and Qualifications ought to be supposed and understood. What I would here observe, is, that there is no occasion to *suppose* an equality of all kinds of Improvements. If the Moral Improvements of Christians be equal, how differently soever they may be qualified in other respects, I presume they will be equally *favoured*, tho' it may be, not equally *happy*. To clear this matter, and explain myself, I shall shew, *first*, That Two Christians equally sincere, may have equal Favour, notwithstanding the inequality of their Capacities. And in the *next* place, That an equality of Favour does not infer an equality of Happiness.

As to the former, I presume it will be granted me, that all the Gifts and Acquisitions of the Understanding do not actually produce an Improvement of Mens Morals ; even where

there is no defect of Sincerity. This being premised, I think I may affirm, that such Gifts and Improvements as are purely *Intellectual*, are not Objects of *Favour* properly so called. It may be said that God beholds with *Complacency* all kinds of Perfections in his Creatures ; but his *Favour* in the true sense of the word, respects those Qualifications and Improvements, and those only, which are of a *Moral* Nature. But that my Proof may not wholly rest on the sense of a word, which possibly I have mistaken ; I ask whether the Man in the *Parable*, who doubled his *Two Talents*, was not as graciously received as he who doubled his *Five Talents* ? The *Parable* does not say that he was rewarded less ; but I own it is reasonable to suppose it : And therefore I ask why and upon what account was it less ? Was it because his Lord was less pleased with his Conduct ? No surely, but because of his Inferior Abilities.

In the next Place I am to shew, That an equality of *Favour* does not infer an equality of *Happiness*. This seems to be true on a double account. Two Christians may, I think, be equally favoured, and yet not equally rewarded. And they may be supposed equally rewarded, and yet not equally happy. — The former appears from hence, *viz.* That their Capacities being unequal, cannot well admit of the same Degrees of Reward. This may be illustrated by the Case of those Two Persons

sons in the Parable, whom I just now spoke of. Their Rewards we suppose were different, and yet they were answerable to their respective Capacities. There is good reason to conclude, that they were both alike acceptable, both alike favoured. Nevertheless their Qualifications being different, the same Reward was not suitable to them both. — Again, The supposition of an equal Reward does not infer an equality of Happiness. Supposing the Government of *Ten Cities* conferred on both the Persons above-mentioned: 'tis easy to perceive that it might have made one happier than the other, as being better qualified for so great a Post, so extensive an Employment. Thus I think it appears, that equal Measures of Favour are far from inferring equal Measures of Happiness—

When I wrote *The Examination of Mr. Stebbing's Doctrines*, I did not distinguish between the Favour of God, and the Rewards consequent thereupon. But upon further Consideration, I perceived there was not only Ground for such a Distinction, but that it was fitting to insist on it. It seems plain to me, that one Christian may obtain greater Rewards than another, and yet God be equally pleased with their Conduct. This, as I have already observed, is the very Case set forth in the Parable. And indeed, parallel Instances occur frequently among Men. A Wise Parent has oftentimes
equal

equal Affection for Two Children equally Dutiful ; yet upon the account of a superior Capacity, he designs a more profitable, or more honourable Profession for the one, than the other. — The Order and Regularity of the World require a subordination in every State, Upon this account Men are differently Gifted in this World, without any Regard to their Deserts or Demerits. And forasmuch as superior Endowments do proportionably contribute to the advancement of Mens Happiness ; hence it follows, that of Two Christians equally sincere, the one may naturally enjoy more than the other, both in this World and the next, This Difference of Enjoyment, being only a natural Consequence of the inequality of their Gifts, does by no means imply any inequality of the *Rewarder's* Favour.

If you think the foregoing Distinction frivolous, and ask me the reason of my insisting on it ; my Answer is, that it seems to me a material Point, and worth our Enquiry, whether Mens Intellectual Endowments can entitle them to additional Degrees of *Favour*, as well as *Reward*. If the Negative prove true, as I believe it will ; some Consequences will follow from it not to be despised. I shall only mention one. It cannot but be a Comfort to sincere Christians of meaner Capacities, to think, that tho' others more capable, will have the Advantage of them in some respects ; yet upon that

that account only, they will not be more beloved of God than themselves.—— Thus a Dutiful Child is pleased and rejoiced, when he reflects that his Father has the same Affection for him, that he has for another of more pregnant Parts. Tho' he knows that other is intended for a higher and more desirable Profession than himself, yet this Disadvantage is in a great measure compensated by that pleasing Reflection.

There is another seeming Difficulty attending the Bishop's Doctrine of Sincerity, which tho' neither you nor Mr. Stebbing has directly meddled with, yet I think proper to examine by way of Prevention. I doubt not but in the course of the Controversy it would be produced, and therefore to save Time and Trouble, I shall endeavour to dispatch it before-hand. Besides it stands full in my way, and strikes at the very Foundation of the Doctrine. This Difficulty arises from his Lordship's Account of Sincerity, which nevertheless I think very just. He makes it to signify a Man's *best Endeavours and utmost Application in the use of all proper Methods for his Information*. Here then it may be objected, that such a Sincerity as this is merely Imaginary, as not being to be found any where among Men.

This must be a true Description of perfect Sincerity, whether it can be found among Men or no. It will be allowed that such a Sincerity
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is possible, and therefore may be supposed. To say that a Man cannot do his best, or his utmost, is to say that he cannot do what he can do, which, as Mr. *Chillingworth* observes, is saying we know not what. However we have good reason to grant with that excellent Author, that it's very rare for Men to act up to the utmost extent of their Power.

We are therefore to consider in the first place, what Measure or Degree of Sincerity will justify an Erroneous Christian : that is, what Measure of Care and Application. For of strict and perfect Sincerity every Body is sensible there can be no degrees. Now to this Question it is easily answered, such a Measure as may justly be expected from Men, the common Frailties of Humane Nature considered, and also their particular Abilities, Opportunities, and other the like Circumstances. Thus Mr. *Chillingworth* tells us, *That God will not impute Errors, as Sins, to those who use such a measure of Industry in finding Truth, as Humane Prudence, and ordinary Discretion shall advise them to, in matters of this Consequence.*

But we are further to enquire and consider, whether such an Erroneous Christian as this can be entitled to the same Degrees of Favour with the Orthodox. Tho' he carefully endeavoured to find out the Truth, yet in all probability he did not do his very utmost. And indeed it may be questioned, whether any Man
ever

ever did. I mean not in respect of some particular Occasions, but the general Tenour of his Conduct. By how much therefore the Endeavours of this Erroneous Christian fall short of his utmost, will he not fall proportionably short of that measure of Favour to which the Orthodox Christian is entitled? — I answer that he will not, excepting upon one of these Suppositions, *viz.* either that the Orthodox Christian has done *his* utmost, which is not to be supposed of him any more than the other. Or else, that the Errors of the sincere Christian are of such a Nature, as to hinder his Moral Improvements. If this be not supposed, he will be entitled to the same Favour with the other. For the Orthodox Christian himself will not be favoured in proportion to his Orthodoxy, but to the Care he has taken, and the Improvements he has made. If he has taken more Care, he will be more favoured. But if their Care has been equal, and their Moral Improvements are so too, then it may still be maintained, that they will be equally favoured. The accidental Rectitude of the one, tho' it may be an Advantage to him in some respects, yet if it has not occasioned the betterings of his Morals, and the improving of his Vertues, it will not, I think, make him in any degree more acceptable in God's Sight.

I proposed Sir when I began, an Examination of more Difficulties and Objections than I
D have

have yet got through. But I have insensibly run out to a greater length than I intended ; and I fear you will think I have already broke my Promise. However I believe you will be so candid, as to allow that I have singled out the main Difficulties. If you are not satisfied with my Solutions of these, it would be in vain to meddle with any other. And if you are, I am apt to think none of the rest will stick with you. Besides, if your Patience be not quite spent, I would take up one Page more with another Subject. I wish, before I begin, that I was got over it. For tho' I say not much upon it, I foresee I shall be tedious.

Suffer me then to expostulate with you a little, about that Sharpness and Severity of Style, which appears in your late Performances. I am entirely of the Opinion of those, who think a Satyrical way of Writing by no means proper for Divines, but on the contrary very unbecoming ; especially in their Debates on Theological Subjects. It scandalizes the Minds of well-meaning People, and gives the Enemies of our Faith a lamentable occasion of Derision and Reproach. What must we All say or think, when we see our *Guides* so easily provoked, and so hardly pacified ? When we see them drawing their Pens in such a manner, as seems to betray a greater concern for Victory and Revenge, than for Peace and Truth ? I wish there was a Prospect of Healing these Sores

without

without laying them open, or even *with* it. But they have taken such a wide spread, that a Man must be very sanguine who expects a speedy Cure.

What makes this the less to be hoped, is, that the most opprobrious Language is varnished over with the specious Names of Vivacity and Wit. This is called (*forsooth*) writing *with a Spirit*. But what is that Spirit good for, that cannot be reconciled with the true Spirit of Christianity? Let Divines be content to imitate the Simplicity of the Gospel, and not catch at those false Refinements which discover nothing but an ill Taste, and a worse Temper of Mind. Great Pity it is, that those Controversies which might otherwise be very useful for the detection of Error, and the discovery of Truth, should prove so pernicious in Fact, by laying waste the greatest of all Virtues, and engendering Strife, Discord and Confusion.

Should Two Divines in a Controversy by word of Mouth, revile and insult each other, would not this be looked upon as a notorious indecency? A gross violation of good Manners? This is the least part of the Imputation which they would thereby incur. Accordingly but few are so intemperate in their Passions, as to fall into such unbecoming Liberties. But whatever their Tongues be, their Pens are oftentimes remarkably licentious. And is not this the same, nay a greater Fault? In the

other Case a Man may plead, that his Passion insensibly hurried him into unwarrantable Expressions. But when they are taken up calmly and deliberately in a Man's Closet, what is there to excuse or extenuate such a Proceeding? Should it be said that he there writes in a Passion, then I would ask, why he does not blot out as his Passion cools? If he continues out of Temper till his Writings be gone to the Press, let him not call this Passion. 'Tis Hatred and Malice, and therefore so much the worse.

I fear, Sir, what I have been saying on this Subject, will not appear to you in an advantageous Light. You will be apt to call it a Tragical Outcry, raised with an ill intention. Or a Satyr *cloathed in soft Words, and breathed out in soft Complaints*. If you do, my Defence is, that I desire the Reader to believe neither you nor me; but to open his Eyes, and judge for himself. If the Charge I have brought be not true, or if the Fault complained of be not big enough to justify such Complaints; then let the foregoing Lines pass for nothing more than the Sallies of an ungovern'd Pen.

I hope the little Water I have been throwing into the Flames of Controversy, will not make them burn more fiercely, if it cannot abate them. Could any Man be so happy as to quench them entirely; though it cost him the

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Writing of a whole Book, it would be the best Employment that ever he had in his Life.

Once more and I have done. You tell us, Sir, that you shall always think yourself at liberty to examine an Argument as it deserves to be examined. It is possible you may be deceived about the Bishop's Arguments. They may be in reality, stronger and better than you think them to be, and consequently may not deserve what you think they deserve. And supposing them to be as weak as you imagine them; yet may not he believe them to be just? Can you prove that he is insincere in his Debates? That he writes one way and thinks another? I presume you cannot. And if you could, I do not understand what Authority you have to punish him. Why then must he endure whatever you are pleased to inflict, and so often undergo the Corrections of your Cutting Pen? Permit me Sir to say, that you have not examined his Lordship's Arguments as they deserve to be examined. Whether they be really just or no, Time and Reflection must discover. But surely they are plausible enough to deserve a civil Answer.

I shall shut up these Papers with an earnest Wish, that all those Divines who think fit to set up for Authors and Writers of Controversy, would besides their other Preparations, employ
a few

a few Minutes on their Knees, before they sit down to write. More particularly I would recommend to their Use an excellent *Collect* of our Church: I mean that for the *Third Sunday after Easter*. Were this and the like Expedients carefully and constantly made use of; I should hope Worldly Policy would give way to Religious Prudence. Mens Passions also and Prejudices would soon abate; and from Lovers of Contention, they would become Lovers of Truth. I am,

S I R,

Your unfeigned Well-wisher,

and Humble Servant,

SILVIUS.



